

In the claims:

Claims 1 to 14 (canceled)

Claim 15 (original) A semiconductor device structure comprising:

a first metallic interconnect;

a second metallic interconnect;

a primary via structure, disposed between and electrically intercoupling the first and second metallic interconnects; and

a buffer structure, disposed upon the first metallic interconnect in proximity to the primary via structure, and adapted to buffer the primary via structure from diffusive voiding occurring at a contact point between the primary via structure and the first metallic interconnect.

Claim 16 (original) The structure of claim 15 wherein the second metallic interconnect and the primary via structure are copper- based dual damascene structures.

Claim 17 (original) The structure of claim 15 wherein the buffer structure comprises a second via structure, disposed between and electrically intercoupling the first and second interconnects.

Claim 18 (original) The structure of claim 15 wherein the buffer structure comprises a second, electrically inactive, via structure, disposed upon the first metallic interconnect proximal to the primary via structure.

Claim 19 (currently amended) The structure of claim 18 wherein the buffer structure comprises an electrically inactive structure disposed upon the first metallic interconnect to immediately and completely surrounding the primary via structure.

Claim 20 (original) The structure of claim 15 wherein the buffer structure comprises:

a second via structure, disposed between and electrically intercoupling the first and second metallic interconnects; and

a third electrically inactive, via structure, disposed upon the first metallic interconnect proximal to the primary via structure.